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NSA Review Completed

MEMORANDUM FOR:

DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT:

Recent NVA Tactical Deployments
in Indo-China

Some potentially significant VC/NVA unit deployments are now underway in Indo-China. A regional summary follows.

North Laos. Within the past week or so, two regimental headquarters of the NVA 316th Division have moved about 30 miles from the Ban Ban area to within ten miles of Muong Soui on the Plain of Jars (map at Tab A). This is the farthest west that these two headquarters have ever been located on the Plain, although the battalions subordinated to them have been in the area for many months. An additional battalion subordinate to one of the regimental headquarters also recently moved from the Ban Ban area onto the Plain.

Meanwhile, the NVA 312th Division continues to deploy into North Laos from North Vietnam. On January 15, elements of two regiments of the 312th were located at Nong Het, on the Laotian side of the North Vietnamese border (map at Tab A). The 312th supported the NVA offensive on the Plain of Jars last year and then withdrew to North Vietnam. It began its redeployment to North Laos last month.

Enemy truck movements and logistic activity along Route 7, which leads from the North Vietnamese border to the Plain, have also increased significantly. During the week of January 5 - 12, some 480 trucks were sighted on Route 7, a total which has not been equaled since at least 1968. Reports of the destruction of enemy trucks and supplies by U.S. pilots have also shot upward.

South Vietnam. Since late December, the NVA 7th Division has turned its attention away from Cambodia and more toward South Vietnam. Two

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of its three regiments, the 141st and the 165th, are now on the South Vietnamese side of the border in northern Tay Ninh Province (map at Tab B). The Division headquarters and a third regiment remain in Cambodia, but are close to the border.

Meanwhile, the 271st VC Regiment of the VC 9th Division has just completed a long move of some 40 miles from the Kompong Cham area to western Tay Ninh Province in South Vietnam (map at Tab B). Last week, elements of this regiment apparently were responsible for the ambush of an ARVN convoy on Route 22 in South Vietnam.

Further north in South Vietnam, the NVA 2nd Division is moving from the Laotian panhandle to southern MR I, and some divisional elements may now be in their traditional operating area. The NVA 2nd Division withdrew from South Vietnam into the Laotian panhandle last summer, either to rest and refit or to defend against a possible allied ground attack in the Tchepone area. Substantial reinforcements from North Vietnam have since arrived in the Laotian panhandle, however, and the 2nd Division began to redeploy to South Vietnam last month.

Two regiments of the NVA 304th Division have recently moved southward in the North Vietnamese panhandle toward the DMZ. Both of these regiments have previously operated on the South Vietnamese side of the DMZ. They may be preparing to do so again, although it is yet too early to say.

Cambodia. With the return of three VC/NVA regiments to Tay Ninh Province in South Vietnam, the number of major enemy units in Cambodia has declined. So far, only one NVA regiment -- the 52nd -- had arrived in Cambodia via the Laotian infiltration pipeline to offset recent enemy deployments from Cambodia to South Vietnam. The NVA 52nd Regiment left North Vietnam in November; it is now in northeast Cambodia but is apparently continuing to move southward.

The enemy threat that developed around Kompong Cham early last month has also continued to decline. In addition to the return of the VC 271st Regiment to South Vietnam, the NVA 96th Artillery Regiment is moving southwest toward the Mekong below Phnom Penh, where it may attempt to harass allied river convoys (map at Tab C). A third NVA regiment threatening Kompong Cham -- the NVA 95C -- appears headed toward a new enemy base area in the Chup rubber plantation.

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Comment. It seems clear that these divisional and regimental movements relate to the dry season plan which the enemy hopes to implement before mid-May. It is yet early, of course, and additional deployments could substantially modify the current picture. At this point, however, the following developments seem probable from recent deployments:

- In North Laos, the Communists appear to be gearing up for another offensive on the Plain of Jars. So far, they are employing about the same level of forces as they did last year. But their presence on the Plain is now much more extensive than it was at the outset of last year's campaign, and their increased threat in the Laotian panhandle will weigh against the possibility of Laotian reinforcements being moved from the south to the Plain.
- In South Vietnam, the enemy apparently hopes to step up the pace of military action before the end of the dry season, as they have in past years. However, even with the addition of those regiments still in North Vietnam, the forces available to them would be a good deal less this year than last. Thus the level of activity is not likely to reach that of the 1970 dry season, which itself was low in comparison to 1968 and 1969.
- Given the recent transfer of some three regiments back to the South Vietnamese border, it does not appear that the Communists intend to employ their main forces exclusively in Cambodia. You may recall the report on a recent COSVN directive which also indicated that the Communists would attempt to balance the use of their main force assets in Cambodia and southern South Vietnam.

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